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## THE FATHER OF MONISM.

IT will perhaps interest readers of *The Monist* to have before them the following attempt at an English version of the poem—or rather of the principal fragments of it that survive—in which the father<sup>1</sup> of monism embodied the passion, one might almost say the fury, of his conviction that What Is is One. The verses of Parmenides “On the Nature of Things” are remarkable for two reasons: they are the first thorough-going attempt to prove that reality is a unity, and they are the earliest expression of an idea which was to dominate philosophy with tremendous consequences for nearly two thousand years afterward. The conclusions of the Eleatic school as to the nature of reality were too fantastic to be widely accepted; but the theory stated by Parmenides, the first Eleatic, and never since more vigorously stated, that there is only one way of obtaining scientific knowledge about the world, established itself almost without question. That truths having the certainty of demonstration can only be reached by *a priori* reasoning and never by observation of phenomena, which therefore cannot be the objects of science,—this theory, once promulgated by Parmenides, was taken up into the main stream of Greek thought as a fundamental assumption. Plato and Aristotle shared it, and its validity, supported by the great fabric of the Aristotelian logic, was never seriously attacked until Galileo looked through his

<sup>1</sup> Parmenides was the father of monism rather than the first of monists. Xenophanes was “the first of those who went in for monizing” (Aristotle, *Met.*, A. 5. 986b 21), but he was primarily a poet and preacher and had little influence on systematic philosophy.

“optick glass.” Even then it survived in part; for it is still true that we have no absolutely certain knowledge except such as can be deduced from general principles. But when science began to advance independently of Aristotle, the domain of the *a priori* was curtailed. We no longer think that no knowledge except the absolutely certain deserves to be called scientific; in investigating the laws of nature we are content with a high and ever-increasing degree of probability. The main interest of Parmenides’s poem is that in it a tendency which was to defer that consummation for many centuries first becomes articulate.

It has the strangeness of all origins. No literary document of equal importance bristles with problems apparently so hopeless of solution. There are, to begin with, several difficulties connected with its structure. It has two parts: an exposition (with a proem) of the Way of Truth, and an exposition of the Way of Opinion, of which the first is preserved almost in its entirety, while perhaps one-tenth of the second survives.<sup>2</sup> In the opening lines the philosopher is whirled away in the chariot of the Sun to the abode of a Goddess, who expounds to him two doctrines, a true and a false, “the unshaken heart of well-rounded truth” and “the opinions of mortals.” What is the nature of the journey, and who is the Goddess? Why, after she has declared the truth about the universe, should an account which is emphatically stated to be false then be put into her mouth? No certain answer seems possible to these questions. As to the journey, it looks at first sight as if Parmenides were conveyed in the chariot upwards from darkness to the “Gateway of the Paths of Night and Day,” and that then he passes through the gateway into a realm of light where the Goddess makes her revelations. But it is just possible to interpret the text as a descent

<sup>2</sup> Hermann Diels, *Parmenides Lehrgedicht*, p. 26. Berlin, 1897.

to the nether world. On this view, which is that of Otto Gilbert,<sup>3</sup> the gate described so minutely in the proem (13-24)<sup>4</sup> is the door of Hades. We must conceive the philosopher as accompanying the Sun on its nightly journey to the under-world, and the Maidens who guide the car as persuading the Goddess to open the gate of Night and Day, which she guards, that they may pass through and the Sun resume his daily course. They then drive on and upwards, leaving Parmenides alone with the Goddess, who is no other than that "Justice" or "Necessity" mentioned in other parts of the poem. There is much to recommend this view, which is interesting as making Parmenides one of the illustrious company of poets, headed by Homer, Virgil and Dante, who have descended to the under-world; but the arguments for and against it cannot be discussed here. Whether the journey be heavenward or hellward, the identification of the Goddess with Justice and Necessity, and again with her who, in the cosmological part of the poem, is in the center of the "rings," "steers all things," and is the creator of the gods (187-192), has great plausibility. Mr. Cornford<sup>5</sup> has ingeniously connected her with the principle on which, in primitive religious systems, the universe is marked out by tabus. But on these points there is likely for some time to come to be more speculation than agreement among scholars.

As to the Way of Opinion, which forms the last part of the poem, and which seems to have contained a system of the world in which concentric spheres or rings of light and darkness played a part, and an account of the birth and decay of gods, of material objects, of animals and of the bodies and souls of men, the difficulty is to explain why Parmenides stated it in such detail. The few frag-

<sup>3</sup> "Der *δαίμων* des Parmenides," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, Vol. XX, p. 25. Berlin, 1907.

<sup>4</sup> The figures in brackets in the text refer to the lines of my translation.

<sup>5</sup> Francis Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy*, p. 217. London, 1912.

ments of it that we possess are not continuous, and I have therefore not translated them all. It appears from them that the cosmology of the Way of Opinion had an affinity to that of the Pythagoreans, and Professor Burnet has sought in this fact an explanation of our difficulty. Parmenides had been a Pythagorean, and was now, he suggests, founding a dissident school. It was therefore "necessary for him to instruct his disciples in the system they might be called on to oppose."<sup>6</sup> If we adopt this view, we may outline the trend of the argument as follows, disengaging it from the archaic language in which it is expressed.

Nothing can have any reality except What Is: for every thought must have an object—thought and its object in fact form an indivisible unity—and the object of a thought cannot be nothing (49, 61-64, 129-131). Further, reality must be eternal, i. e., without beginning and without end. It cannot come into being, because it cannot be produced by nothing, and nothing existed before the existence of that which is real (86-98). Again, no reason can be given why, if it began to be, it should begin at one time rather than another (92-94). And similarly it cannot come to an end (106-108). Thus it is a mistake to attribute any reality at all to the processes of change, growth and decay that we see going on round us (109-112, 135-140). And reality is absolutely single, simple and continuous. It cannot have parts, because, if there were parts, there would be empty gaps between them and thus more reality in some places than in others, which is absurd (113-117, 145-150). We must therefore conceive the substance of the universe as shaped like a sphere (since the spherical is the most unbroken and perfect of forms) with no vacuum anywhere, perfectly stable, with no differences, changes or motions (141-144). This sphere, though its

\* J. Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, p. 211. London, 1908.

existence is temporally endless, is limited in space; for if it were infinite there would always be "something lacking" to complete the sum-total of reality; but this is impossible (125-128). Thus the prejudices of common sense, which sees differences everywhere—differences of distance, for instance (49)—and thinks that things become and perish and that there is such a thing as change of sensible qualities (135-140), are all false, in spite of the difficulty we have in shaking them off, confirmed as they seem to be by constant experience (42). And not only so, the more refined views of philosophers are false too, particularly the views of Heraclitus of Ephesus, who holds that the only scientific truth attainable is that based on the endless flow of shifting sense-experience (69-76).<sup>7</sup> There is only one way of attaining truth, namely by following reason (45-48). There is, however, one account of the universe, that given by the Pythagoreans, which is so inherently plausible that it must be expounded at length; you must be versed in its details to be able to refute them (167, 168). It is based on a dualism—that of the "light" or "fiery" and "dark" or "heavy" elements—which of course cannot for a moment be accepted, as our argument proves conclusively that all things are One.

But when we have done the best we can with the journey and the Goddess and the Way of Opinion a stumbling-block still remains. It is not only modern readers to whom it seems strange that Parmenides wrote in verse; the fact disconcerted antiquity as well. It was felt that he was essentially prosaic. Why then did he drape his theory in the rich, stiff, hieratic dress of the hexameter, as the old sculptors clothed their idea of deity in stiffly falling lines of stone and bronze and wood? Why did this first

<sup>7</sup> It is generally agreed that the vituperation of these lines is directed against Heraclitus. For the opposition between Parmenides as the philosopher of pure reason and Heraclitus as the philosopher of experience see Emanuel Loew, "Parmenides und Herakleitos im Wechselkämpfe," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, Vol. XXIV, p. 343. Berlin, 1911.

founder of rationalism begin the custom, which has since had so long and so curious a history, of mixing argument with poetry? The essence of his gospel is "Cleave to the dry light of the intellect, whatever the richness of the facts that strike the senses," and one would think that, than such a gospel, nothing was less suitable to poetry, for which, besides, he evidently had but a meager gift. His technique is clumsy, his images artificial and insipid; his lines jolt and hobble, and he has no warmth of imagination, no glowing colors with which to enrich and soften the bald severity of his subject.

Perhaps it was partly out of opposition to Heraclitus, with his talent for hitting out a striking phrase in prose, that Parmenides chose verse. "Let this gross believer in the trustworthiness of sense-perception string his pedestrian sentences together; my doctrine of the perfect stability, the unbroken unity, of the real demands a form as stable and rounded as itself." Such may have been his feeling. And perhaps the influence of Hesiod went for something. Hesiod had written his account of "Works and Days," of the birth of gods and the ordering of the world, in hexameters, and there is more than one Hesiodic trait in Parmenides. Another influence may have been the Orphic poems current in the Pythagorean school from which Parmenides sprang. But whatever his motives, and whatever his defects as a poet (they have been exaggerated by some critics, minimized by others<sup>8</sup>), our verdict must on the whole be that he was justified. It is not so much that the introduction contains what Diels<sup>9</sup> calls "a powerful conception." That is a matter of opinion; many readers will find it unimpressive where it is vague (and it is nearly all vague), and pointless where it is precise, as in the

<sup>8</sup> Exaggerated by Proclus (*In Plat. Parm.*, I, 665, Paris, 1864), by Plutarch (*De Rat. Aud.*, 3, 45B, *Quomodo Adul.*, 2, 16C), by Philo (*De Prov.*, II, 39), by Cicero (*Ac.*, II, 74); minimized by Bergk, *Kleine Schriften*, II, 10). See Diels, *op. cit.*, pp. 4ff.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

description of the gate. Parmenides's real justification is the intensity of his passion for the truth.

All philosophers, no doubt, are impassioned for the truth, but not all philosophers are possessed of a passion for the compulsive force of argument. When a man has hit upon an abstract argument in which he can see no flaw and which leads to conclusions violently opposed both to common sense and to the views of other philosophers, his zeal is apt to take an almost religious tinge. Up to a point the love of reason seems, indeed, to be implanted in the human breast. The most irrational of men, those most impatient of logic, take an unconscious pleasure in the struggle to elicit conclusions from premises; the motions of their minds, sluggish though they may be, are always fumbling after some rudiments of a chain of inference. But let the beauties of logical connection once become the object of conscious admiration and be deliberately pursued for their own sake, and there are men who, having tasted blood, will stop nowhere. In them our natural, unconscious pleasure in ratiocination is heightened to the *n*th power; they exalt the value of consistency above everything in the world. It becomes a fixed idea; they give up everything for it; they embrace an abstraction with the abandonment with which the lover embraces his mistress, the devotee his god. The world, to them, is well lost for logic. Are the facts against them? So much the worse for the facts, they cry. They are the martyrs of reason; they are sublime. And they are more than sublime, they are right; for the progress of humanity depends in the long run on the love of reason.

Parmenides was such a man, and his verses are poetry because they are moulded by this passion. That is why they are least good in the half-mythological, half-allegorical preface with which, for reasons at which we can but dimly guess, he leads up to his belief that nothing Is



except *What Is*, and best when he is in the thick of his argument, stumbling, stammering, repeating himself, and wrestling with the reluctance of the language of his day to express his ideas. In his desperate anxiety to make his point clear his verses become rough and harsh, and it is then that they take on a certain sublimity, as of igneous rocks compressed and thrown up by tremendous subterranean forces.

It will perhaps be objected that he could have made his point clear more easily in prose. To this an answer has been provided by a very different poet, Alexander Pope, who explains, in the introduction to the "*Essay on Man*," that he found he could actually express his philosophical ideas more concisely in verse than in prose. For the labor of throwing a theory into verse has at any rate this merit, that the philosopher who is diffuse is lost. The nature of the medium compels him to grind and sharpen his thoughts until, purged of all superfluities, they attain the utmost sparseness and compactness of which they are capable. So true is this that far from blaming Parmenides we should wish that modern philosophers would imitate him and Lucretius and compose in verse; their arguments, if like Lucretius and Parmenides it is their arguments they are in earnest about, might be improved by the discipline. On the other hand if like Pope they care not a pin for the argument but greatly for the opportunities of verbal decoration, conceivably some entertaining poetry might be produced.

Passion, then, and conciseness—passion in spite of the lack of imaginative heat, conciseness in spite of clumsiness and repetition—are Parmenides's most striking qualities. That the quatrains into which I have transposed him preserve more than the dimmest reflection of these qualities it would be too much to hope. Hardly can the color and life of a phrase be conveyed from one living

language to another, much less from an ancient to a living language. The only respect in which the translator can hope to be a faithful mirror is in giving, feature by feature, the connections of his author's thought; and, since in doing this he may be allowed to take the necessary liberties with his text, I have had no compunction in condensing here, amplifying there, and occasionally omitting a line or two altogether. Without trying to be always literal I have aimed at omitting no point of importance. The real difficulty was to find a vocabulary not too remote in spirit from the original. In the case of an early philosopher this difficulty is especially acute.

Parmenides was 65 years old when he came to Athens and talked with Socrates who was then a youth of 18 to 20—a fact<sup>10</sup> which gives us 516-514, B. C., as the date of his birth—and at the time he taught the process of stretching the words and phrases of ordinary speech to fit philosophical ideas had scarcely begun. In the absence of a technical vocabulary thought both outruns language and is crippled by it, so that our more abstract colorless words which have a long philosophical evolution behind them seldom quite fit the early thinker's meaning. It is not that his ideas are vaguer than ours, but their vagueness is of a different kind. Ours is a washed-out vagueness, theirs a dense, packed vagueness, pregnant with the germs of future growth. Thus the translator is in a dilemma. He cannot, since the thoughts he is to render are philosophical, altogether avoid words which, like "reason" or "infinite," have done philosophical duty for centuries; yet he knows that such words distort the spirit of the original, because their fifth-century Greek equivalents are only just beginning to have a specialized philosophical color. For this reason I have employed such words as sparingly as pos-

<sup>10</sup> Plato is the authority for this (*Parm.*, 127b). Diogenes's statement that Parmenides "flourished" 504-500 B. C. does not seem a sufficient ground for questioning Plato's accuracy.

sible. But then another danger arises. Modern technical phrases may strike a false note, but if we do not use them we risk blurring the outlines of the technical questions the author is struggling to state. Above all in Parmenides's poem the student is fascinated by the spectacle of later ideas stirring in embryo,—as where he announces in one place (62): "It must needs be that what can be thought and spoken of is," in another (129) that thought and "the goal of thought" (i. e., that for the sake of which the thought is, that to which it is directed, its *object*, as we say) are one and the same, and again (135, 158) that certain things, e. g., becoming and perishing, are mere names. Here we seem to catch logic and epistemology almost in the act of being born. What is meaning? What are propositions? Must not the object of every judgment be something real? Can an object of consciousness be conceived apart from a conscious subject? These vast questions are enfolded in the verses of Parmenides as the oak in the acorn. Another instance is the argument, on which he bases the oneness of What Is, that there cannot be more reality in one place than in another (51, 52, 113-116, 145-152). We may trace here the germ of Zeno's antinomy of the great and little,<sup>11</sup> which in its turn is the germ of that supposed self-contradictoriness of the infinite divisibility of space which has played so important a part in modern philosophy. Such problems hovered before the mind of Parmenides as in a glass darkly, and I shall be content if in my translation some faint image of them can still be discerned.

#### PARMENIDES ON THE NATURE OF THINGS.

##### *I. The Journey.*

And so, behind that team of sapient steeds,  
 On the illustrious road divine that leads  
 The wise world-wanderer to his heart's desire,  
 The straining car that bears me onward speeds;

<sup>11</sup> Simplicius, *Ph.*, 141, 1, quoted by Diels, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

5 On, ever on, its forerunners a band  
Of Maids. The axle-tree even as a brand  
Smouldered, and shrilled a music as of pipes  
To the twin wheels that rac'd on either hand,

When, once again from the dim house of night  
10 Hastening upwards to the realms of light,  
The Daughters of the Sun-God cast away  
Their sable kerchiefs and their heads undight.

Here stands the portal where the paths divide  
Of night and day; stony the threshold, wide  
15 The lintel; filled with mighty doors it is,  
By which the great Avenger doth abide,—

Justice, who grasps the ever-changing key.  
Her did the Maids persuade with honey'd plea  
To slip the pin and smite the bolt away;  
20 And the doors sprang asunder instantly,

As one by one the posts of knotted brass  
Back on the hinges rolled their thick-wrought mass,  
Yawning to let the Maids and steeds and car  
On through the gulph and up the highway pass.

25 And me the Goddess greeted, and with look  
Benign my right hand in her right hand took,  
And "Hail!" she said "O Youth, for thou art sped  
Divinely hither; hail!" and thus bespoke:

" 'Tis no ill doom hath led thee on this road  
30 Far from the common track of mortals trod,  
But, tended by those deathless Charioteers,  
Justice and Right bring thee to my abode.

“Thine be it now the steadfast heart to know  
 Of Truth well-rounded, and the ebb and flow  
 35 Of Semblance in men’s minds; no sure belief  
 Is in it; thou must learn it even so,

“That, testing all things, so thou may’st declare  
 The Things that Seem, how men should judge they Are;  
 Yet must thou set a curb upon thy thought,  
 40 And ever of illusion’s path beware,

“Lest, poring all too closely on that maze,  
 The force of use and wont distract thy gaze,  
 And, droning in thine ear an idle din,  
 Hurry thee babbling down deceitful ways.

45 “But hold to Reason when dispute is rife,  
 And thou shalt know there is not any strife  
 Can shake this much-tried argument of mine:  
 This is the proof, this is the Way of Life.”

## *II. The Way of Truth.*

“See how thought makes the far thing near! ’Tis  
 plain  
 50 Thou canst not cleave the All that Is in twain;  
 ’Tis not a thing of parcels that may be  
 Scattered abroad, nor yet heaped up again.

“Come, ponder deeply these two Ways of Thought  
 By which alone all knowledge must be sought,—  
 55 The Way of Truth and Suasion hand in hand,—  
 That What Is Is and Not to Be is Naught,—

“And then the Way of those who take for true  
 What neither tongue can tell nor thought pursue,—

That something Is Not and must needs Not Be:  
60 That path as wholly blind thou shalt eschew.

“For how can what Is Not be ever known,  
Since to be thought on and to be are one?  
For everything may be, nay needs must be,  
Which speech can name or the mind think upon;

65 “But what Is Not in Being hath no part.  
Lay deeply, then, these precepts to thy heart,  
That from the snare of false opinion’s Way  
Thy firm-set feet may evermore depart;

“Much more from that which witless mortals stray,  
70 Double-faced fools who know not what they say,  
But sightless, shiftless, lacking pilotage,  
Palsied and deaf, they hither and thither sway;

“Dull herds, to whom the Thing that Is doth seem  
The same as what Is Not; and then they deem  
75 The same is not the same, and all the world  
Whelm in an ever backward-flowing stream.

“Of this be sure, there is no argument  
Shall prove What Is Not Is; be thou content  
To curb thy wit from searching out that way,  
80 On the one Way of Being wholly bent:

“Whereon is set full many a sign to tell  
That All that Is is indestructible,  
Nor ever was created; for complete,  
And endless is it, and immovable.

85 “It never was nor will be; it Is now,  
Whole, one, continuous. Its sources how

Wilt thou search out? Or whence draw its increase?  
 'From that which was before it,' sayest thou?

"But Nothing was before. From Nothing, then?  
 90 But this may not be utterèd of men,  
     Nay, nor conceived, that Nothing ever was.  
 And if from Nothing, what should choose the when,

"What fix the soon or late, by what decree,  
 When that which Is should start to grow and be?  
 95 Wherefore hold fast this Truth: the Thing which Is  
 Or all in all or not at all must be.

"Nor will the force of true belief allow  
 Out of what Is Not aught save Naught to grow;  
     Therefore things neither perish nor become;  
 100 Justice hath fettered them nor lets them go.

"Is it, or Is it Not? All must abide  
 That test. Let stern Necessity decide,  
     Who saith 'It Is' is true, and casts 'Is Not'  
 As nameless and unthinkable aside.

105 "How then could That which Is ever arise?  
 For if it was, it Is Not; and likewise  
     It can not be some day about to be;  
 Who saith 'It will be' that It Is denies.

"And thus becoming, like a flickering flame,  
 110 Is quite extinguished, and that other name,  
     Destruction, is an empty sound; What Is  
 Hath nor an end nor source from which it came.

"And how divide it where no difference is,  
 Nor more of it in that place than in this

115 To hold its unity apart? Thus all  
Is full of it. What Is cleaves to What Is.

“And therefore, as in mighty bonds comprest,  
Without beginning, in an endless rest  
Is that Which Is, since we have spurned afar  
120 Birth and destruction at the truth’s behest.

“Ever the same and ever in one stay  
(For strong Necessity hath every way  
Fastened the limit round It) It abides,  
And changes not, wrapt in Itself alway.

125 “And straitly bound in limits, as is fit,  
The All that Is can not be infinite;  
Else It would lack all things; but, lo, It lacks  
Nothing; Naught can be added unto It.

“Thought and the goal of thought, these two are one.  
130 For never shalt thou find beneath the sun  
A thought exprest without the Thing that Is;  
Since no things are, nor shall be, no not one,

“Save those which into the one perfect round  
Of moveless being fate hath strictly bound.  
135 Wherefore those names that mortals in their speech  
Fix, and believe them true, are empty sound,

“Telling of birth and of destruction,  
Of how things change their places and are gone,  
How now they are, and now forsooth are not,  
140 And how fair colors fade that brightly shone.

“But since What Is hath an extremest bound,  
’Tis like a massy sphere’s unbroken round,



Which, from the center poised equally,  
Complete and equal every way is found.

145 "There is no Nothing anywhere to break  
Its even unity, or greater make  
Its plenitude in this place than in that;  
It can not here be strong and there be weak;

"For not in any wise can That which Is  
150 Be present more in that place than in this;  
Out from the center to the utmost verge  
All equal is and all inviolate is."

### *III. The Way of Opinion.*

"Thus far the Truth with reasons sure and clear  
Have I declar'd, and next what Shows appear  
155 To mortal men must be in order told:  
Do thou to my deceitful song give ear.

"Two Forms there are that mortals have in mind  
To name, and naming one they wander blind;  
They part the twain as opposite in shape,  
160 And to each opposite are marks assigned.

"To one they give the Heaven's ethereal flame,  
Gentle, exceeding light, ever the same,  
Itself like to itself; contrariwise  
To another Form they give another name,—

165 "The heavy body of darkness, solid night,  
Set over against the influence of light.  
(I tell thee all as all most likely seems,  
That no man's subtlety may pass thee quite.)

170 “And then, their names being given to night and light  
 And to whate’er belongs to either’s might,  
       Since neither in the other hath a share  
 All things are filled with equal light and night.

\*   \*   \*

“The substance of the Heavens shalt thou know,  
 And all the high fixed signs that in them glow,  
 175     And those effulgent labors of the Sun—  
 Whence come his cleansing fires and whither go;

“The wandering Moon too, with her pale round face,  
 Her works and substance shall thy cunning trace;  
       And how the Heavens were born, by what dread  
       law  
 180   They bind the world and hold the stars in place.

“And thou shalt know how Sun and Moon and Earth  
 And uttermost Olympus sprang to birth,  
       And all-embracing Ether, and the might  
 Of burning Stars, and the Heaven’s milky girth.

\*   \*   \*

185 “With unmixed fire are fill’d the inmost rings;  
 The next with darkness; and the appointed springs  
       Of flame gush in between; and in the midst  
 The Goddess is who sways and steers all Things,

“Urging all creatures on the sweets to prove  
 190   Of mating and the painful fruits thereof,  
       Male unto female, female unto male;  
 For of all Gods the first she fashioned Love.”

SYDNEY WATERLOW.

LONDON, ENGLAND.